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AN EIGHTH-GRADE NEWSPAPER

AN EXPERIMENT IN ENGLISH INVOLVING UNITY OF PURPOSE AS AGAINST INDIVIDUAL EFFORT

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Children entering the eighth grade are supposed to know the mechanics of composition work. They are also expected to be able to construct into readable shape their own thoughts and experiences, to the extent of from one hundred to two hundred words. The work of the eighth grade is to enlarge upon this. Spontaneity in thought-expression combined with proficiency in mechanical detail is the goal to be attained.

Spontaneity in expression depends upon experiences that are of vital importance to the child. Proficiency in mechanical detail depends upon practice that is frequent and varied.

Situations which lend themselves to freedom of expression must be both vital and recent. A teacher who is alert finds many such situations in the everyday life—home and school—of the children. But these are likely to be of individual interest. I find that very effective situations may be created—those which involve unity of purpose and interest in a common end. One such occasion centered around the writing of a book called “The Party.” The book took the composition time for two weeks following the giving of a school party by the class. “Story-Telling” was another occasion of interest—the stories being both written and told by members of the class. The occasion that furnished the audience and the incentive was an assembly of all the elementary grades. The subject-matter—both vital and recent as a history study—was the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Another situation that was most interesting and profitable centered around the “getting-out” of a newspaper. I will describe this one in detail.

The entire composition class of thirty-nine eighth-grade pupils resolved itself into an office force and devoted its composition time

for two weeks to newspaper work. The paper was to be finished by the end of two weeks and was to be read by members of the "force" before an assembly of all the grades. The time limit furnished an incentive for writing under stress and the prospective audience furnished the motive for creditable work. At the first few meetings of the force preliminary problems were considered. The most important of these were: (1) length of time for reading the paper; (2) size and form of paper; (3) audience; (4) nature of material to go into paper; (5) plan of manipulation of work. After discussion we decided to "get out" a paper that could be read to an audience in twenty-five minutes. Children from the first grade through the seventh with their teachers, supervisors, and principal made up the audience. This presented a problem as to subject-matter. We decided that articles must be written which would be of interest to little children and yet be worthy of eighth-grade effort. This led to consideration of the nature of the material: Should the paper contain town news or school news? Should it be of local or of general interest? After a frank discussion someone suggested that we consider the school as a locality or community and that the children, teachers, and all connected with the school be considered the citizens, and that the different phases of school work, as manual training, gymnasium, reading, geography, etc., constitute the enterprises of the community. This was satisfactory to all, for now we could get out a newspaper concerned entirely with school affairs. It was still left to consider under what heads our articles should appear. The children were all emphatic in holding entirely to the newspaper idea and this list of headings was decided upon:

Personal Mention	Weather Report
Editorial	Sporting News
City News	Cartoons
Story	Advertisements
Poem	Funny Column
Market Reports	

Before the force could get down to writing, there were still considerations to be disposed of. The paper was to be read the Friday preceding Thanksgiving, hence it was decided that it

should be a Thanksgiving number and the President's Proclamation was added to our list. It was suggested that the story ought to be a Thanksgiving one. Cartoons appropriate and advertisements incident to Thanksgiving seemed easy.

We decided that in addition to our other topics we would write up some phase of the work connected with each room in the elementary school. We planned that these articles should make up an important part of the material of the paper, for, as one girl put it, "That will make it easy to interest the children, for even the first-grade children will like to hear what we have to say about them."

As to manipulation of the work: An editor-in-chief and two assistants were elected. The three boys at once felt the responsibility of making it a "go." Reporters were also elected—two for each room in the elementary school and two for each of the other headings in our list.

The editor-in-chief and his assistants thought it would be wise that everybody on the force should write an editorial and allow the editors to choose the best one. This plan was also suggested for the story. One meeting was taken up with a discussion on "editorials." At its close the children knew the essentials of a good one. They knew where it was to be found in the paper and they had decided that theirs should set forth the sentiments of their paper in regard to Thanksgiving. Some of the editorials were quite good, but the editors saw how it was possible to work up a fine one by putting together selected thoughts from all. This is the editorial as it went into the paper:

This paper believes that "the best Thanksgiving is Thanksliving." We ought to make every day in the year a Thanksgiving day. Most people seem to think that a good time, a holiday, and a big dinner—with emphasis on the dinner—constitute a perfect Thanksgiving. But we would have them remember the old saying of Shakespeare, "Yet for aught I see they are sick that surfeit with too much as they that starve with nothing."

By far the most interesting feature of all the work was that in connection with the reports from the several rooms. The reporters asked the teachers for interviews and arranged for a visiting-time when they might observe the work going on. I saw in advance

the different teachers and explained fully to them what we were doing. I asked them to grant the visiting-time to the reporters when there was work going on that they would like especially well to have reported. (Co-operation here meant a unifying influence so far as the school as a whole was concerned.)

At the appointed times the reporters went for their visits. They always came back scarcely able to wait until they could find time to write up what they had seen and heard. The two reporters from each room worked together and came to me with their articles or asked permission to read them to the class. All the articles that went into the paper were read to the entire class for suggestions, the class taking on the attitude of an audience to see whether or no the writing was clear and interesting. Criticism was free and often severe, but common interest in the paper made it easy to give and easy to take. The reporters were always eager to go to work at revising or rewriting. In several instances the articles were worked over the fourth and fifth time—the children never showing any signs of weariness. Here are two articles typical of room reports:

MISS STAPLES' ROOM (FIRST GRADE)

Last week on Thursday afternoon Miss Staples' room was visited by two reporters of this paper. It is a light, cheery room with large east windows. It is also made pleasant with its cream-colored walls, brown woodwork, plants, palms, and goldfish.

At half-past one the attention of the school was called by the words "Lips still." Then the children were requested to raise their hands so Miss Staples might see if they were clean. The B Reading Class got their chairs and placed them very carefully and quietly in a semicircle in the front of the room, while the C Class passed to the board to draw houses and trees that they could see out of the window. The children were very much interested in their reading and they dramatized it very well by putting a great deal of feeling into it. The general attitude of the room was very good.

The desks are placed in a sort of semicircle so that the children can watch each other while they recite. The tennis shoes are fastened on the rod under the desk. On the right side of each desk is a black pocket. The contents of this pocket are: a box of paints, a paint dish, a paint cloth, a box of crayons, a pair of scissors, a button hook, and a finger-nail cleaner. On the other side of the desk is another pocket containing a drinking-cup wrapped in a napkin to keep it clean.

As a part of the children's work, they make up dreams. They fold their

arms and dream. Those who have dreams pass to the front of the room to tell them. This is good practice for them to learn to speak before an audience. One little boy dreamed this: "I dreamed it was the Fourth of July and I was a fire-cracker. Pretty soon I turned into a torpedo. I had a face and arms and legs. I was walking along the street and I tripped and fell on my side and exploded."

DOG STORIES BY MISS MARVIN'S PUPILS (FOURTH GRADE)

The pupils of Miss Marvin's room were writing stories of dogs on Thursday morning of last week. All the stories are to be typewritten by the pupils themselves, bound in a book, and then sent to the children at the hospital.

These stories were illustrated in three different ways: with kodak pictures, freehand drawings, and with tracings. Copies are to be kept also and sent to the Tri-County Fair next fall.

These are some of the best subjects: "My Old Cat on Sunday Morning," "A Story of Prince," "My Cat Tempest," "A True Story of Rover," "The Result of His Visit," "A True Story of Rags." They were all very good.

As time drew near for the paper to be finished, during office hours (composition and penmanship time) nearly all phases of the work in all stages of development could be seen going on. Interviews, writing, revising, cartoon-making, conference with the editors, etc., were in progress. The children were at work singly and in groups in the main office (our schoolroom), at the tables in the textbook library, and at the long table in the principal's office.

We called the paper the *Elementary School Weekly*. It was hand-printed on a double sheet of four pages. Each page was 15×13 inches in size and was divided into four columns—the customary margins being allowed. The cartoons were reproduced on large sheets of tag board and placed where they could be seen easily by the audience. Members of the force read to the audience the different articles in the paper, including the "Funny Column" and advertisements. Proof of its success was the fact that it held the entire attention of all the audience during the reading.

As to results: Aside from the benefits in English resulting from opportunity offered for spontaneity and freedom of expression, the children had had experience in doing team-work—they had worked together for a common end and knew they had done something worth while. This gave them confidence and assurance, which showed in greater strength of attack upon other school affairs involving sustained effort, co-operation, and power of initiative.